

More student space needed: SU

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News Writer

New buildings going up on campus may soon have explicit guidelines for the inclusion of student space, and the Students' Union is quite pleased by the prospect.

"The SU is working to get the University to include percentages of student space, student study space and group space in each of their new building designs," explained SU President Samantha Power. "We're lobbying for University budgets to be more reflective of student needs, including student space."

Part of this work has apparently paid off, as the University of Alberta Planning and Infrastructure Department is rethinking how they look at informal student space, a process that University Architect Len Rodrigues said is overdue.

"What we're in the midst of doing is reassessing the contents of our space manual, which is the document [that] guides the allocation and development of space in all the programs that we do," Rodrigues said. "Last time [the guidelines] were actually updated was a minor update in 1989, and they were authored in 1983. It's about time that we reviewed it, and brought it up to speed."

According to Rodrigues, student space was taken out of the difference between the net area of a building—including classrooms, offices or laboratories—and the gross area—the whole area of a building, including hallways, washrooms, stairwells and wall thicknesses.

"What we're trying to do, and what we're trying to get more explicit, is



PHIL HEAD

ROOM WITH A (RE)VIEW Building guides are due for a look, says Rodrigues.

to actually have a net assignable area, area that is available to the users of a building for these kinds of purposes," Rodrigues explained.

The SU had several complaints regarding the old guidelines.

"We've been discussing the problems with CCIS [Centennial Centre for Interdisciplinary Science] and how they haven't consulted students properly on what student space is needed in the building," Power said. "[Also, the Engineering Teaching and Learning Complex] was developed with the ESS [Engineering Students' Society], in terms of student group needs and student study space. It wasn't developed to the ideal."

But Rodrigues disagreed.

"The new CCIS building, does a very nice job of providing that ability to move through the building ... without it being a crowded circumstance ... All student study space in ECERF, ETLC and

so on ... were really the result of discussions with the architects, the Faculty and were extra to the basic academic program requirements."

Any changes made to the guidelines will not be in final draft until at least the end of this year, Rodrigues said. He added that nothing would be approved without very wide input from both students and faculty.

"All of our buildings are trying to really provide the best possible environments that we can have for students and staff," Rodrigues said. "[And] because it's a public institution, we have an obligation to make things as effective and as efficient as we can, and to utilize our facilities as best we can."

During Students' Council on Tuesday, Vice-President (Academic) Amanda Henry presented a motion to make a mandate of advocating the University to provide more student space. The motion was passed by a large majority.

Business co-ops already going global

CO-OPS • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Questions about the lack of international students in co-ops have been brought before faculty too, but Porteous said that the program was successful and didn't need review until now.

"The reality is that doing co-op is not a prerequisite to getting an engineering degree," Porteous said.

Though business and engineering co-ops are both non-mandatory, Amanda Henry, Students' Union VP (Academic), pointed out that if international students want to interact with Albertan industry and community on a meaningful level, the current circumstances can be a challenge.

"It's not that international students are being barred from an academic program; they're being barred from a particular kind of academic program," Henry said. "Although on paper they don't need that co-op to get their bachelor of whatever, it's an integral part of the program and that's been recognized by incorporating it into the program."

The SU passed a political policy statement at Council in September to open up discussions with faculty and students about the international student disadvantage, but the project is still in its infant stages.

"Other than the political policy, it's been sort of touch and go," Mathewson said.

Mike Percy, Dean of the School of Business at the U of A, said that the business co-op is going into its twelfth year as an accredited academic program, but that this is the first year that international students are able to participate.

He explained that companies use

co-ops as a form of probationary appointment, to see if the participating student fits in with the culture of the company, ultimately hoping to hire the student permanently.

"The fact that international students wouldn't be available subsequent to their graduation for full-time employment was always a handicap. And it was nothing to do with discrimination—it was part of the role that co-op programs historically played," Percy said.

All students have to pay to be admitted to the business co-op program, but the faculty can't guarantee that each student will get a job since hiring is up to the employer. Percy explained that in the past, accepting money from international students was unfair, but given today's thriving market and demand for employees—and the change in off-campus work regulations—things are looking up.

"Canadian firms are becoming increasingly global in their perspectives. They may see value now in having an international student that they did not necessarily see previously," Percy said.

Brent Collingwood, co-op director in the School of Business, said that out of 192 applications, 155 students were admitted to the co-op program.

"We only had ten international students apply of which eight were admitted into the program," Collingwood said.

Even before the federal government created the off-campus work permit, Collingwood said that business co-ops were moving in that direction.

"There's a labour shortage in Alberta, and so even on a short-term

basis, the companies are now more and more in their own processes, starting to find ways to accommodate the international student. It made it more convenient that the off-campus work permit came at the same time, but we hadn't planned it that way; it just was coincidence that they happened at the same time," Collingwood said.

And though the School of Business does now admit international students into the co-op program, Percy understands the challenges with undergoing this change, and that employers are especially worried that communication skills, which are necessary for safety and productivity, may not be as strong with foreign students.

"What's the most common complaint you hear by students on campus, in some faculties: that they can't understand their instructor. And in that sense, employers are no different than students, in their perception that they want effective, clear communication," Percy said. "Not all international students, perhaps, have the necessary language skills to be successful when they first come to the U of A campus."

Despite potential challenges, Henry is hopeful that the Faculty of Engineering can follow the business lead, and finish their review of the program with a decision to admit international students to the co-op program.

"They've done a couple of surveys and some other kinds of background research that they're in the process of going through," Henry said. "[The SU] is looking at what students can do to feed into that process for now."

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